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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 000908

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [UNSC](#) [BM](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: CONSULTATIONS ON BURMA WITH JAPAN

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Classified By: POL M/C W. Michael Meserve. Reasons:1.4(b/d).

11. (C) Summary: In February 15 meetings on Burma with a visiting DOS delegation, Japanese officials said Japan:

-- shares U.S. values and objectives in Burma and is sending the regime a similar message;

-- has significantly reduced its level of economic assistance to the point that little Japanese economic activity remains;

-- is concerned that China, India and Thailand may be filling the gap left by Japan's withdrawal;

-- is reviewing its Burma policy and that an extension of ASSK's detention in May may prompt a policy change.

End Summary.

Sanctions and Engagement

12. (C) During a February 15 meeting with MOFA Asian Affairs Bureau DDG Toshihisa Takata, EAP/MLS Deputy Director Robert Rapson and delegation reviewed U.S. policy toward Burma and our bilateral and multilateral efforts to press the Burmese regime to initiate a credible and inclusive political process. Rapson encouraged continued close coordination between Japan and the United States on Burma. Takata asserted that Japan shares the same values of democracy and human rights as the United States and wants to effect meaningful change in Burma. He lamented, however, that there had been no progress toward democratic reforms despite the U.S./EU sanctions policy and the Japanese policy of engagement. Nonetheless, Japan believed that the combination of pressure and encouragement would take time to achieve results and welcomed the recent ASEAN efforts to increase pressure on Burma. Takata stressed that Japan sought to achieve real change, not simply to send strong messages. Even a small step forward would be welcome, he noted. Rapson noted that absent "meaningful" pressure on the regime, it was unlikely we would see "meaningful" political change and reforms. The United States and others are also interested in seeing the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and an environment in Burma in which NGOs and other humanitarian assistance entities could operate more freely.

Concern About Burma's Neighbors

13. (C) Takata expressed Japan's concerns regarding China's relations with Burma. He underscored Japan's view that the PRC approved the status quo in Burma and would not seek to change the regime's basic policy until after China had firmly established its economic presence in the country. India's ties with Burma were also a problem, he added. Rapson stated that the United States was discussing the situation in Burma with both China and India at senior levels and that they were beginning to evince concerns similar to those of the United States, especially regarding cross-border issues -- although that had yet to translate into any specific actions/messages to the regime. He noted that there were increasing indications the Burmese regime takes seriously the views of the international community, underscoring the importance of sending a coordinated message to the junta. To help focus the international community's attention on the regime, the United States will work with others in finding an appropriate opportunity in the coming months to bring Burma before the UN Security Council again. Takata responded that Japan's consistent message to the regime has been that it must be more open to the international community and that it must release all political prisoners. He advocated increased coordination of the international community's messages to the regime. Rapson and delegation concurred.

Japan's Engagement Efforts

14. (C) Rapson and delegation took up the issues discussed with Takata in greater detail in a separate February 15 meeting with a broader representation of MOFA officials led by Foreign Policy Bureau Policy Coordination Division Senior Policy Coordinator Tsutomu Nakagawa. Asked to elaborate on Japanese activities in Burma, Nakagawa stated that Japan has limited policy alternatives, but is trying its best through constructive engagement to induce the regime to play a more

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positive role in the international community and to effect democratic reforms. Japan's message to Burma is that it must: 1) reactivate its dialogue with the international community; 2) resume dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi; and 3) release all political prisoners.

15. (C) Japan's primary effort in Burma involves providing very limited grass-roots humanitarian assistance through specific NGO projects on a highly selective basis, Nakagawa continued. Japan's ambassador has repeatedly urged the regime to allow NGOs greater freedom to operate within the country. Although its ODA has already decreased by more than half since 2002, Japan is planning further reductions in economic assistance, Nakagawa noted. He cautioned that China and Thailand appear to be filling the gap. Nakagawa said that few Japanese companies are operating in Burma due to the unavailability of trade insurance. Japan has no major involvement in the Burmese economy at this time, especially in the energy sector, he asserted.

Increasing International Pressure

16. (C) Rapson re-emphasized that the United States is working with partner countries to seek additional means of increasing international pressure on the regime. It is important for the Burmese regime to know that the international community condemns its behavior, he stressed. Nakagawa noted the recent helpful change in ASEAN's view towards the regime, saying Japan wants to make the best use of Malaysian Foreign Minister Hamid's prospective visit to Burma. Rapson agreed and hoped that Hamid would be able to visit Burma soon, although signals from the regime on this front were not encouraging. Nakagawa concurred with Rapson that the United Nations could play a vital role in influencing the regime. UN organizations operating in Burma, the UN Special Envoy and the UN's efforts in raising the

international community's awareness of the problems in Burma were all useful tools. Japan would encourage the UN Secretariat's Political Bureau to brief UN members on Burma

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following FM Hamid's visit, Nakagawa stated.

Differences on National Convention

17. (C) In providing the U.S. assessment of the regime's so-called roadmap to democracy, Rapson indicated that the United States and others view the National Convention as a sham process designed to strengthen the regime's control and to buy it additional time in power. Nakagawa noted that Japan holds a somewhat different perception of the regime's plan than the United States, though he acknowledged many problems with the National Convention, particularly the absence of some important groups. Nonetheless, Tokyo saw some value in the regime engaging in this admittedly faulty democratic process, even if the benefits were meager. For that reason, Japan has encouraged the regime to speed the process of adopting the charter and holding the planned referendum, as well as to include all political parties and ethnic groups in the process.

Narcotics Situation

18. (C) After listening to the U.S. delegation's report on the increase in Burma's narcotics trade, particularly on increased production of crystal meth and "ecstasy" in Wa state, MOFA expressed interest in learning more details of the narcotics situation in Burma as it had received reports of declining opium production. The two delegations agreed to consult more closely on the matter.

A Policy Turning Point?

19. (C) At a follow-on working lunch, Nakagawa was unusually candid in explaining the recent modification in Japan's Burma policy. FM Aso's early-December, Asia-policy address had emphasized the importance Japan places on human rights and democracy in the region. That was intended to send a clear signal of Japan's willingness to toughen its policies toward Burma and Cambodia, he observed. Following the mid-December informal UNSC discussion on Burma, Japan had expressed its dissatisfaction with the current situation to the regime and informed the regime that Japan's policy could change if there were no clear signs of qualitative improvement on human

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rights and democracy. Nakagawa said that Japan's Burma policy continued under ministry-wide review and commented that Tokyo might be approaching a "turning point." Opining that it could not endure "more of the same" from Rangoon, Nakagawa speculated that Japan might change its policy if Aung San Suu Kyi's detention is further extended in May. Indulging in a bit of personal speculation, Nakagawa said he thought that FM Aso might be looking for a tangible foreign-policy achievement prior to the LDP presidential election in September, in which the Foreign Minister has publicly and repeatedly expressed his intended candidacy. Underscoring firmly that there were no such plans at present, Nakagawa said that Southeast Asia might present an attractive option for such an initiative, including a possible high-level contact with the Burmese regime.

110. (U) EAP/MLS Deputy Director Rapson cleared this message.
SCHIEFFER